

## We need your help!

We want to have your feedback and comments for the DCFS Newsletter. No matter if you are an employee of DCFS or a division partner we would like your ideas and stories on what we should include in future DCFS Newsletters.



FOR FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS

SCOTTY ADAMS AT **501.683.7250**

OR E-MAIL AT

**SCOTTY.ADAMS@ARKANSAS.GOV**

### Care-Commit-Connect

### Welcome to DCFS! New Employees

Jillian Chandler	Washington
Clinton Sago	Crawford
Carlos Torres	Crawford
Lindsay Spears	Benton
Michael Luster	Baxter
Nicole Luster	Sebastian
Lorna Battles	Washington
Janica Humphrey	Craighead
Jessica Clark	Mississippi
Jamie Attwood	Washington
Cortney Higgs	Washington
Steve Stapleton	Boone
Bilesa Capers	Greene
Sabrina Taylor	Jefferson
Roy Collins	Washington
Whitney Lan	Sebastian
Joshua Dixon	Independence
Liane Guthrie	Faulkner
Jonathan Arnett	Johnson
Demetrius Paskel	Central Office
Sheila Dolan	Sebastian
Lona Petterson	Sharp
Pamela Maxwell	Yell
Robilyn Key	Mississippi
Judy Castagno	Benton

Alison Bailey
Sheila Brewer
India Dillard
Jaesha Quarrels
Amanda Hayes
Lyne Wayne
Becky Terrell
Susan Easley
Melissa Hodges
Mary Hawkins
Stephanie Doherty
Polly Holloway
Teryn Moreland
Michael Barton
Taneshia Willis
LaTonya Worley
Tasha Donahou
Cathleen Armstrong
Erin Garrett
Wilma Olivey
Cindy Smith
Julieah Evans
Angela Gonzalez
Robert Cooper
Shatina Hawkins
Stacy Lee
Brandon Robinson
Carmen Hamilton
Victoria Dortch
Beverly Reed
Donyel Ashley

Washington
Benton
Sebastian
Craighead
Sebastian
Lawrence
Sebastian
Sebastian
Lonoke
Pulaski South
Logan
Pulaski Jacksonville
Jefferson
Jefferson
Lonoke
Central Registry
Sebastian
Jefferson
Sebastian
Sevier
Izard
Benton
Washington
Washington
Washington
Benton
Benton
Conway
Washington
Pulaski North
Sebastian

Mary Murphy
Payton Laney
Laron Whiteside
Deborah Metcalf-Jones
DeShana Fulton
Yulonda Johnson
Fallen Shaw
Amanda Hudgens
Cheryl Goodlow
Tami Broadway
Paul Catron
Jessica Boverhoff
Cristin Young
Montoyia Key
Ambra Conway
Billy Huggins
Nancy Jones
Calyn Smith
Patricee Conic
Robin Stevens
Markeia Bradley
Nicole Wright
Patrice Seymore
Stephanie Stone
Loretta Harrell
Megan Murphy-Potts
Katerine Hudson
Maria Haynes
Mary Isham
Kristine Phillips

Sebastian
Cross
Mississippi
Mississippi
Pulaski East
Pulaski
Washington
Scott
Craighead
Montgomery
Independence
Izard
Boone
Crawford
Lonoke
Jefferson
Eligibility Unit
Lonoke
Pulaski South
Jefferson
Jefferson
Scott
Mississippi
Pulaski East
Union
Sebastian
Sebastian
Sebastian
Lonoke

*Happy Holidays and  
Happy New Year!*

[WWW.ARKANSAS.GOV/  
DHS/CHILNFAM](http://WWW.ARKANSAS.GOV/DHS/CHILNFAM)  
FOR THE  
CALENDAR OF EVENTS IN  
YOUR AREA.

ISSUE 4 ■ HOLIDAYS ■ 2011

# DCFS Connections

## Director's Note...from Cecile Blucker

### Happy Holidays!

We have seen a lot of progress and positive movement within the Division over the last year. I credit the progress to the work each of you do every day. You have worked hard and through your courage, determination and relentless drive to fulfill the agency's mission and objectives we have achieved success!

During the holiday season, I want to wish you and your family a great holiday season. I wish each of you a very wonderful and prosperous year ahead and may we all work together this way every year and bring even more successes to the Division and to the clients we serve each day.

Keep in mind - the beauty of the Christmas season can remind us of all the beauty in life that we take for granted -our family, our friends and our faith.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**

*Cecile*

### What's Inside:

CHRISTMAS BAZAAR  
HIGHLIGHTES

ADOPTION & EXPECTATIONS  
FAQ

PROJECT PLAY

INAUGURAL WINTER  
LEADERSHIP BALL



**ARKANSAS  
DEPARTMENT OF  
HUMAN  
SERVICES**





## DCFS ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BAZAAR

The annual DCFS Christmas Bazaar has come and gone again this year. There are too many people to thank who contributed countless hours to make sure this event was successful as it always is. They are very appreciated. So are all the DHS employees who purchased items.

The Bazaar which is a cluster of events held in December every year takes all of the proceeds into the Foster Care Christmas Fund which helps supplement the Ginger Bread Tree that provides Christmas presents for Arkansas' foster children for the holidays.

This year's event included a bake sale, arts and crafts area, silent auction, and chili/hot dog/frito pie sale. An Omelet Bar was donated by Golden Corral in November to also assist in the fundraiser. Again thanks to all who help make the event successful every year!



## FASD Awareness Day – September 9th!

Every year on September 9th, International FASD Awareness Day is observed. Proclamations are issued in countries, states, provinces, and towns all around the world. Bells are rung at 9:09 a.m. in every time zone from New Zealand to Alaska. People all around the world gather for events to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy and the plight of individuals and families who struggle with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs). The first FAS Day was celebrated on 9/9/1999. This day was chosen so that on the ninth day of the ninth month of the year, the world will remember that during the nine months of pregnancy a woman should abstain from alcohol.

There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant. There is also no safe time during pregnancy to drink and no safe kind of alcohol. **CDC urges pregnant women not to drink alcohol any time during pregnancy.**

FASDs are 100% preventable. If a woman doesn't drink alcohol while she is pregnant, her child cannot have an FASD.

Many people do not know that alcohol is dangerous to the unborn child, but when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, so does her unborn baby. Alcohol in the mother's blood passes through the placenta to the baby through the umbilical cord. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and a range of lifelong disorders, known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs). Children with FASDs might have the following characteristics and behaviors:

- ◇ Small head size
- ◇ Shorter-than-average height
- ◇ Low body weight
- ◇ Poor coordination
- ◇ Hyperactive behavior
- ◇ Difficulty paying attention
- ◇ Poor memory
- ◇ Difficulty in school (especially with math)
- ◇ Learning disabilities
- ◇ Speech and language delays
- ◇ Intellectual disability or low IQ
- ◇ Poor reasoning and judgment skills
- ◇ Sleep and sucking problems as a baby
- ◇ Vision or hearing problems
- ◇ Problems with the heart, kidney, or bones



Picture taken at a Fayetteville area church on FASD Day.

**Alcohol use among women of childbearing age is a leading, preventable cause of birth defects and developmental disabilities in the United States.**

**Please help us spread the word & prevent FASD's**

By Carol Rangel



# DCFS Announcements

- The UALR School of Social Work and the AR Department of Human Services have been awarded a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Child Welfare--Early Education Partnerships to expand Protective Factors for Children Welfare Involvement Grant Initiative. The goal is to increase collaboration between early childhood care and child welfare systems in order to improve access to high quality child care for children in foster care. The project is focused on improving outcomes of young children ages birth to five that have known involvement with child welfare system in Arkansas with special attention to those children that have had an entry in the foster care system.

Be on the look-out for more information regarding this new opportunity to improve outcomes for children in foster care!

For more information, please feel free to contact Mona Davis or Christin Harper.

- We are pleased to announce that Jennifer Wunstel has accepted the job as Area Director for Area III. Mrs. Wunstel has been acting Director for this area since, July 7, 2011. Her office will be located in Saline County. She was employed as a worker in Cleburne County in 1995 and became a supervisor in Faulkner County in 1997. During that time she assumed the following positions: Faulkner County Supervisor, ILP Supervisor, Adoption Supervisor, Resource Supervisor, Area ICPC Liaison and Faulkner County Unit Supervisor. Ms. Wunstel obtained her MSW in 2009. Please welcome Ms. Wunstel as the new Area Director in Area III.



# Project Play



## Every Child in Foster Care Deserves Our Best.

Over the next year, you will be hearing a lot about the importance of quality child care for foster children. DCFS has partnered with the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE), as well as local universities and other partners, to develop new strategies to increase the number of foster children who are enrolled in high quality child care programs. This issue is a priority at the state and federal level - In fact, faculty from the School of Social Work at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock were recently awarded a federal grant from the Administration on Children and Families to develop linkages between child welfare and early education agencies and providers in Arkansas. You can expect to learn more about this in the coming months. The following is a condensed version of a more comprehensive brief connected with this initiative. To see the full brief with citations, visit:

[familymedicine.uams.edu/ProjectPLAY/Resources](http://familymedicine.uams.edu/ProjectPLAY/Resources)

## Quality Childcare: More Than Just a Safe Place

Foster parents look for child care that is safe, affordable and convenient. But what if child care could provide more? Children in foster care deserve our best efforts to turn this 'what if' into a reality. It is critical that we look for opportunities to increase access to stable, high quality child care for these vulnerable children.

## Stability

Stability is a critical ingredient to the development of all relationships, especially those between young children and their caregivers. Through this relationship, children learn that the world is a safe place and that their needs will be met. Stability allows a child to gain a sense of security and trust.

## Attachment

'Attachment' develops when children's needs are met through consistent, responsive caregiving. Secure attachments support the infant's exploration of the world and provide the foundation for healthy development. Attachment is linked to the ability to learn, to control one's behavior, to have school success, and to be able to form relationships. Disrupted attachment contributes to emotional, social, and behavior problems and can have negative effects on the developing brain. Attention to children's attachment is essential for improving outcomes for children in protective services.

CONTINUED

## Velma Sorrows & Jo Aley

Most of you know about Velma Sorrows and Jo Aley's tireless effort for the annual DHS Gingerbread Tree that benefits foster children in the state of Arkansas. But in case you do not these two ladies have made sure the annual event that collects toys for Arkansas' foster kids runs every year without a hitch. Every year over 7,000 toys are collected and combed through so that all children in foster care within the state have multiple gifts to open on Christmas Day. Ms. Sorrows has been with the state off and on for over 30 years. Ms. Aley for 10 years. Both of these wonderful ladies certainly are appreciated for their long hours they put in during the months of November and December every year. They are what the true meaning of Christmas is all about!





## IT'S A FACT:

New quality foster homes are needed more than ever. There were 531 new foster homes recruited during SFY 2011. During the same timeframe 528 foster homes were closed with a majority of these closings due to the foster parents adopting.

## Project Play (Continued)

### We can promote policies that increase stability for children:

- Provide funding or incentives to increase the likelihood a child remains in the same child care center during transitions when possible.
- Provide assistance for transportation if needed so the child can continue enrollment after reuniting with biological parents or being moved to a new foster home.
- Support child care centers serving children in foster care in improving quality and reducing staff turnover.
- Bring the child care provider into the case as a team member. Share information on the child's medical and social history, assessments, and needs with the child care provider. Clearly identify what information can be shared while still adhering to confidentiality guidelines.
- Use the child care center the child is familiar with as a visitation site. Support child care centers in this effort.

Support foster, adoptive, and biological families in maintaining the child's enrollment. Look into options for continuing vouchers when case closes (through adoption or returning home) to enable the child to remain at the same child care center.

Parents can look for centers participating in the quality improvement system and find a check list for evaluating child care programs on the Better Beginnings website: [www.ArBetterBeginnings.com](http://www.ArBetterBeginnings.com)

## Adoptions and Expectations-FAQ



Q: Do you have to have TPR before you change the goal of the case plan?

A: No. The goal may be changed to adoption, but in some cases, the court wants to make the goal change. The County would request the goal be changed in the court report.

Q: How would we know if a child would be eligible for an Adoption Subsidy?

A: The Adoption Specialists make those assessments by using the definition of Special Needs quoted in policy. There is no longer an income guideline for state funded subsidies. There must be documentation of the Special Need such as doctor reports, psychological, etc.

Q: If we have someone that is interested in adopting specific children in foster care, what do we do?

A: Notify your Adoption Specialist. Please do NOT let them start visiting the children. We will need to go through the process of approving for adoption prior to any visits or placements.

Q: Who conducts the Adoption Re-evaluation so Adopt Only homes continue to be approved for adopting.

A: Adoption specialist and the contracted provider.

Q: When is the best time frame to begin to involve the Adoption Specialist?

A: Policy states to invite the Adoption Specialist to the Permanency Planning staffing, PPH, Termination staffing and TPR hearing. An Adoption Specialist can be assigned prior to TPR and we would rather be involved before then. When the county knows they are headed to TPR, they should request an Adoption Specialist be assigned Secondary.

## Project Play (Continued)



### Quality Matters

A stable child care setting is important. Equally important is the quality of child care. High quality child care is linked to enhanced cognitive, language, and social-emotional development for children. Children in high quality care have been shown to have higher language skills and do better in school. This is especially true for disadvantaged or at-risk children. Children in low quality care show less growth in language, math, and social-emotional development and are at risk of falling further behind.

### High Quality Childcare

There are many components of quality child care. One of the most important is the **caregiver-child relationship**. When quality components are in place, such as sensitive and warm caregiving children are more likely to make developmental and learning gains.

Programs such as Head Start/Early Head Start have a comprehensive approach that includes assessment and referral for therapeutic or psychological services as well as parent involvement. These services can help a foster child catch up. While not all families and children in protective services have access to facilities with special services, priority should be given to centers that do provide comprehensive services and/or demonstrate commitment to standards of quality care.

High quality care can play a positive role in early childhood development. Low quality child care or frequent changes in child care are additional risk factors in the life of a vulnerable child.

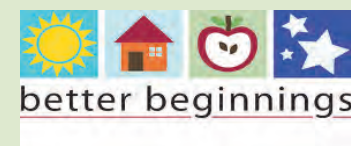
## Policy Recommendations:

### Promoting Increased Stability and Quality Child Care

Our community can move towards policy and practice that further recognizes the special vulnerabilities of children in foster care and make decisions with the goal of addressing all their developmental needs including placement and continuity in quality child care.

### We can promote policies that increase understanding of and access to quality child care:

- Educate those serving children in protective services (family service workers, courts, foster parents, child care professionals) on the importance of including stable, consistent, and
- quality child care in each child's life as they transition from home to home.
- Establish policies to ensure the first choice is a high quality child care program, especially one with a comprehensive array of services.
- In areas where quality care is scarce, consider contracts with high quality centers, especially those with comprehensive services, to reserve slots for children in foster care.
- Consider developing a team of trained professionals to evaluate the situation when there are concerns about the quality of a center where a child in foster care is enrolled.



Permanency Roundtables

PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLE SUCCESS STORIES

Angela\* is a 17 year old who had been in and out of residential and acute placements. She had run away from several of her foster homes. The last time she ran from one of the foster homes, she hooked up with an old family friend and was there for almost two months until she was involved in a car accident and had to have emergency surgery. At that time, Angela confessed to the lady that she was on runaway from the Agency. The lady came forth and reported the situation and stated that she was willing to obtain custody of the child. She submitted to all the required home study and criminal background and registry checks. All of the checks came back favorable and the Judge granted her permanent custody. Today, Angela is reportedly doing well in her placement and has made some other family connections. Despite the adversity and the challenges Angela faced in foster care, she was able to connect with a supportive adult who was willing to commit to a lifelong relationship with the youth.

Devin was 17 years old when his grandmother was granted guardianship. With this placement, Devin\* was able to have support from his father and uncle upon leaving DHS custody at the age of 18. However, his grandmother died a few months afterward. But, he continues to be supported by his father and uncle. He had WRAP services to prepare him for residing in the community with his sexualized behavior. Devin has not had any problems since he has been reintegrated into the community. Although there were concerns that he would be a danger to the community, with appropriate support of his family, Devin has been able to maintain successfully in his environment.

Nick\* was 17 years old when he located his older brother. The Agency approved Nick to have contact and visits with his brother. Once Nick turned 18 years old, he decided to go and live with his older brother. Today, Nick is still doing well with his older brother and keeps in touch with the Agency.

\*Names have been changed to protect confidentiality. By Dena Perry

DCFS ATTENDS EDUCATION SUMMITT

DCFS attended an Education Summit in Arlington in November 2011. Cecile Blucker, DCFS Director, Mona Davis, DCFS Planning Manager; Berniece Russell, Department of Education; Chandra Martin, Department of Education; Cindy Hogue, Department of Education, Wiley Branton, Pulaski County Judge; and Barbara Halsey, Judge with 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District represented the Arkansas Team.

The purpose of the meeting was to learn strategies, network with other states, and develop a plan to address Educational Stability with children in out of home placements. The following goals were identified for Arkansas and over the next year we will be working to achieve better outcomes as it relates to educational stability for children who enter foster care.

- Short Term Goals:
- ◊ Complete the Educational Guide for workers, CASA, and other stakeholders
  - ◊ Establish routine meetings with Department of Education and problem solve systemic issues (policies, enrollment, transportation)
- Long Term Goals:
- ◊ Develop curriculum and conduct training for Dept. of Ed Foster Care liaisons and the DCFS staff
  - ◊ Have Effective Youth led Transitional Team Meetings that involve the Dept. of Education personnel and others as appropriate.

The team identified several next steps to achieve the above over the course of the next year. If you have a particular interest in assisting with problem solving educational stability or other education barriers related to children in foster care, please contact Mona Davis at 501-682-6812 or email at [mona.davis@arkansas.gov](mailto:mona.davis@arkansas.gov)

Websites and Resources

- [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)
- [www.fosterparentcollege.com/info/connections](http://www.fosterparentcollege.com/info/connections)
- [www.midsouth.ualr.edu](http://www.midsouth.ualr.edu)
- [www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children](http://www.americanhumane.org/protecting-children)
- [www.arkansas.gov/reportARchildabuse](http://www.arkansas.gov/reportARchildabuse)
- [www.fosterarkansas.org](http://www.fosterarkansas.org)
- [www.dhsshare.arkansas.gov/pages/default.aspx](http://www.dhsshare.arkansas.gov/pages/default.aspx)
- [www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly](http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly)
- [www.nctsnet.org](http://www.nctsnet.org)
- [www.fema.gov/kids](http://www.fema.gov/kids)
- [www.childrendefense.org](http://www.childrendefense.org)
- [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com)
- [www.ppcwg.org/communications-overview.html](http://www.ppcwg.org/communications-overview.html)
- [www.fosteringconnections.org](http://www.fosteringconnections.org)



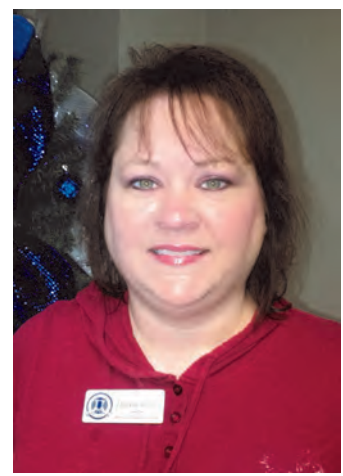
NEW FOSTER PARENT LIASON

DCFS is pleased to announce that Theresa Boyett, a Saline County foster parent, is now serving as the Volunteer State Foster Parent Liaison. The liaison will primarily offer support to DCFS foster parents when they have specific needs or questions about resources. This is not a position that will respond to or mediate specific case issues or personnel issues. Those specific issues will continue to be handled through the Division chain of command.

- Liaison responsibilities include:
- ◊ serving as a statewide contact to identify resources needed by foster parents and children in care
  - ◊ developing a list of resources for foster parents
  - ◊ assisting foster parents in navigating the child welfare system
  - ◊ advocating for children’s educational needs
  - ◊ tracking trends /issues/concerns and sharing those with the DCFS Foster Care Manager
  - ◊ maintaining the foster parent website
  - ◊ assisting with recruitment and retention activities

A letter will be sent to foster parents announcing and explaining this new volunteer liaison role at the beginning of 2012. We hope that this new volunteer liaison role will provide support to foster parents from someone who understands what it is like to be a DCFS foster parent since she has served in that role herself...and by providing another resource to foster parents, we hope that it will help support our staff as well!

Ms. Boyett can be reached by phone at 501-847-2903 or 501-840-6401 or by email at [theresa.boyett@yahoo.com](mailto:theresa.boyett@yahoo.com).





Differential Response

Differential Response (DR) in child protective services is emerging across the United States as a new way of organizing the response to child maltreatment so that agencies have a choice in how to respond to child safety and well-being concerns. An increasing number of states and localities are establishing differential response systems. The state of Arkansas, Department of children and family services is currently in the planning stages with plans to implement a Differential Response system on July 1, 2012.

WHAT IS Differential Response: Differential Response is a method that allows child welfare systems the ability to respond to reports of specific allegations of child maltreatment with either a child protection investigation or a family assessment.

While investigations require the gathering of forensic evidence and a formal determination as to whether there is a preponderance of evidences that child abuse or neglect has occurred, a family assessment is a non-adversarial, non accusatory response. There are no findings of Substantiated or Unsubstantiated, and no one is identified as a perpetrator in family assessment cases.

The work to design the Arkansas Differential Response Model began with a committee of key staff who researched Alternative Responses in other states, identified the criteria for cases to be assigned to the Family Assessment tract; developed a protocol for the assessments to occur while creating standards for community groups to take the lead in identifying service needs, developing an assessment process, and putting together an array of essential services that need to be provided.

The Family assessment is a short term array of services focused on enhancing the ability of parents to create safe and nurturing home environments that promote healthy child development; assure the safety of all family members; help children and their families resolve crisis, connect with necessary and appropriate services and remain safely together in their home whenever possible. The Arkansas model will focus on low risk neglect maltreatment allegations.

The state of Arkansas was recently selected to participate in a Shared Learning Collaborative along with the states of Idaho, Washington and Oregon. The Shared Learning Collaborative provided Arkansas with a wealth of information and resources to assist in the successful implementation of the Arkansas Differential Response Model.

Arkansas will be submitting a request for proposal for community providers to partner with us to have this prevention program available in Arkansas. We hope to have the RFP out this spring for consideration. We are on track with program development and are working on the training component of the DR program.

By Linda Williams & Leslie Sebren

Thank you letter from a Foster Child



Like every year a Holiday Bonus is provided to foster parents during the holidays for each foster child that is in their home for them to participate in the experience of giving. This is a fantastic letter DCFS received from a child in foster care.





UPDATE: Mountains and Plains Child Welfare Implementation Center (MPCWIC)  
AR C.I.R.C.L.E.S Project Kick Off

DCFS supervisors from across the state met with MPCWIC project team members in Little Rock on October 21<sup>st</sup>. This meeting allowed MPCWIC project team members to discuss the role of implementation centers across the country and how Arkansas was chosen. To review the MPCWIC presentation, [click here](#).

The Arkansas MPCWIC project name is “AR C.I.R.C.L.E.S.” which stands for *Creating Informed Results through Competent Leadership and Empowered Supervision*.

The October 21<sup>st</sup> meeting also provided an opportunity for supervisors to give project team members feedback regarding challenges and successes related to supervision in the Arkansas child welfare system. This information has guided subsequent project planning activities. We will keep you updated on these planning activities as various components and tools of the plan are more fully developed.

The remainder of this article provides an overview of the *Learning Circles* tool which is just one of the strategies implemented in the AR C.I.R.C.L.E.S project.

Learning Circles: A Fresh Approach with Deep Roots

*“The way we “do business” has changed, and I think it’s in direct relation to staff on all levels, embracing the dynamics of a learning environment and the facilitation of on-going learning circles.” --Catrice M. Fleming, Georgia Department of Family & Children Services*

Since people have worked together, they have gathered to talk and figure out better ways of achieving common goals. Learning Circles (LC) uses this concept in problem solving and decision-making processes in organizations.

LC members collaborate in new ways to address common issues affecting their team, their agency, as well as, their practice with clients. Typically, learning circles meet at least once a month and are led by a trained facilitator who is also a group member. Group composition varies and easily customized to meet an agency’s needs.

During the learning circle, group members focus on a topic in a semi-structured format to develop a plan to address that issue. The meeting format uses the PLAN, ACT, REFLECT, and ADAPT (PARA) approach that mirrors most strategic planning or problem-solving processes; that is to plan, implement, re-assess, and then begin the cycle anew. A loose structure maximizes the meeting time while ensuring fidelity to the Learning Circle model.

Cumulative in nature, learning circles may explore one topic while acting on another, and discussion of a topic may span several meetings. Learning circle members may choose their own topics to discuss in their learning circles, though some agencies may encourage or designate a topic that requires immediate attention.

Whatever the method for how topics are chosen, groups develop their own plan to resolve those issues. Topics explored by learning circles have included secondary trauma, team cohesion, use of data, job satisfaction, and performance monitoring.

The Butler Institute has helped to guide agencies in six states, Colorado, Wyoming, Mississippi, Georgia, Massachusetts and Arkansas as well as tribes in North Dakota in the development of their learning circle projects. For more information: contact Charmaine Brittain, [Charmaine.Brittain@du.edu](mailto:Charmaine.Brittain@du.edu)

*Arkansas expects to introduce the use of the Learning Circle tool using three (3) implementation phases with an increasing number of participating counties in each phase. Garland, Lincoln, North Pulaski and Lawrence counties have been chosen to help launch Phase One. We had our first planning meeting December 13<sup>th</sup> and have identified a targeted launch date! We’ll keep you posted on our progress!* By Tammie Langston

Youth Advisory Board members collaborate with National youth organization Youth M.O.V.E. Arkansas

December 10th the Arkansas Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and Youth Motivating Others through Voices of Experience (M.O.V.E.) Arkansas members enjoyed a festive evening at the Peabody last Friday for the Inaugural Winter Leadership Ball. The event was designed to unite the youth voice here in Arkansas as both youth boards work to advocate on behalf of

other youth experiencing “systems”. Youth enjoyed dinner, dancing and the opportunity to get to know each other as they move forward with their collective initiatives. Among many other activities, the YAB advocates on behalf of youth in the DCFS foster care system and YMA members advocate and work on behalf of youth experiencing the mental health care system.

The Winter Ball was the first of several collaborative events the boards have scheduled including the 2012 College Tour and the 2012 Leadership Conference. According to the YAB President, Sedella White, “this event was great and gave us an opportunity to get to know each other as we work together to make a positive impact in the lives of youth either in foster care or experiencing the mental health care system.” There were over 90 attendees that showed their support and helped celebrate the collaborative efforts of our youth.

